

## LIPINSKI PRESSES DEFENSE DEPARTMENT TO LOCATE REMAINS OF U.S. SERVICE MEMBERS IN BATTLE OF TARAWA

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Efforts to bring home the remains of more than 500 U.S. service members killed in the World War II Battle of Tarawa received a boost from Congressman Dan Lipinski (IL-03) this week. Before the defense authorization bill passed the House of Representatives on Thursday, Lipinski succeeded in attaching an amendment that calls for the Defense Department to “recover, identify, and return remains of members of the Armed Forces from Tarawa.”

“Though they lie buried on a distant island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, we cannot forget the courage and sacrifice of those who perished on the shores of Tarawa sixty-six years ago,” Lipinski said. “We must do everything possible to see that their remains are recovered and their families are given a chance to return them to the nation in whose defense they died.”

Tarawa, located halfway between Australia and Hawaii, was the scene of one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. More than 1,100 American lives were lost in three days beginning on Nov. 20, 1943, as the 2 Marine Division and part of the Army’s 27 Infantry took the island in an amphibious assault, dislodging an entrenched force of 5,000 Japanese soldiers.

Congressman Lipinski’s amendment to the defense authorization bill, H.R. 2647, urges the Department of Defense to review new research on the location of the remains of U.S. servicemen on Tarawa and to do everything feasible to see that they are recovered. A total of 564 service members remain unaccounted for.

11 Ward Chicago Alderman James Balcer, a decorated Marine veteran of the Vietnam War, has fought to focus attention on the missing remains on Tarawa, showing leadership on the issue by introducing a resolution that passed the Chicago City Council on a unanimous vote. Lipinski included Balcer’s resolution in the Congressional Record as he spoke on the floor of the House of Representatives urging his colleagues to vote for the amendment.

&ldquo;I want to commend Congressman Lipinski for working toward the recovery of these fallen American heroes who have been abandoned for over sixty years,&rdquo; Balcer said. &ldquo;This is the right thing to do. It is disgraceful that those who died on Tarawa were left behind, and we need to put a spotlight on this.&rdquo;

Many of the missing bodies were buried in temporary graves while the battle raged. While some were disinterred and reinterred in the area by the Navy between 1943 and 1946, no detailed records of the locations have been found. In 1946 and 1947, the Army disinterred all known remains and returned them to Hawaii for identification and repatriation.

Over the last three decades, the remains of several servicemen have been discovered by accident, as a result of construction projects. Recent privately funded research has shed new light on the location of unmarked graves, indicating successful recovery is still possible despite development on Tarawa, part of the independent Republic of Kiribati.

&ldquo;The Marines, soldiers, and sailors who lost their lives as they stormed the beaches of Tarawa under withering fire are true heroes,&rdquo; Lipinski said. &ldquo;It is our solemn duty to see that they are afforded proper burials with all the honors that are their due.&rdquo;

Congressman Lipinski also supports a broader provision in the defense authorization bill that directs the Secretary of Defense to implement a &ldquo;coordinated, integrated, and fully resourced program&rdquo; dedicated to the recovery of the remains of missing military personnel. The bill sets a goal of accounting for missing and unrecovered personnel, starting at 200 service members a year in 2015 and rising to 350 by 2020.

&ldquo;I want to thank Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton for working with me to include my amendment in the bill, and I look forward to working with him to continue to address this issue in the future,&rdquo; Lipinski said.